

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT, JA
SUBJECT: PROGRESSIVES STUMBLE TO VICTORY IN SENDAI

1. SUMMARY: INCUMBENT SENDAI MAYOR TAKESHI SHIMANO WON A SIXTH TERM LAST SUNDAY, BUT HIS PROGRESSIVE SUPPORTERS CAN TAKE LITTLE COMFORT FROM THEIR EFFORTS AT INTER-PARTY COOPERATION. END SUMMARY

2. IN THE FIRST MAJOR LOCAL ELECTION OF 1978, INCUMBENT INDEPENDENT TAKESHI SHIMANO, BACKED BY A FEUDING COALITION OF SOCIALISTS, COMMUNISTS, DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS AND KOMEITO PARTY MEMBERS, FENDED OFF THE CHALLENGES OF A STRONG LDP/NLC CANDIDATE (53 YEAR OLD YOKICHI YOKOTA) AND A QUIXOTIC FORMER JSP LOWER HOUSE MEMBER (YOSHIO CHIBA) TO WIN A SIXTH TERM AS MAYOR OF NORTHERN HONSHU'S MOST IMPORTANT CITY. THE JAPAN SOCIALIST PARTY, WHO SENT A BATTERY OF TOP OFFICIALS TO CAMPAIGN FOR SHIMANO, ARE HAILING THE VICTORY AS A REVERSAL OF LAST YEAR'S TREND TOWARDS CONSERVATIVE VICTORIES IN LOCAL ELECTIONS. THE SENDAI WIN, THEY CONTEND, AUGURS WELL FOR JSP PROSPECTS IN MAYORAL ELECTIONS IN YOKOHAMA AND KYOTO LATER THIS YEAR.

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3. BUT THE PROGRESSIVES, INCLUDING THE JSP, CAN HARDLY TAKE COMFORT FROM THE NARROWNESS OF SHIMANO'S VICTORY. HE RECEIVED ONLY 52 PERCENT DESPITE A RELATIVELY LOW VOTER TURNOUT OF 66 PERCENT WHICH WAS EXPECTED TO FAVOR THE INCUMBENT. IN FACT SHIMANO GARNERED 20,000 FEWER VOTES THAN HE DID IN THE PREVIOUS ELECTION IN 1974. (FINAL RESULTS WERE: SHIMANO - 145,987, YOKOTA -

123,874, CHIBA - 6,989.)

4. THE CAMPS OF BOTH LEADING CONTENDERS WERE RIFE WITH DISSENSION. HAVING LOST IN A BID FOR A LOWER HOUSE SEAT LAST YEAR, CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE YOKOTA WAS SUSPECTED BY MANY LDP SUPPORTERS OF MERELY WANTING TO USE THE MAYORALTY AS A STEPPING STONE FOR A RENEWED EFFORT TO WIN A DIET SEAT. IRONICALLY HIS STRONG SHOWING DESPITE LESS THAN FULL LDP SUPPORT PROBABLY GUARANTEES HIM ANOTHER CHANCE AT THE DIET RACE. ONE OBSERVER TOLD US THAT HAD THE LDP THROWN ITS FULL WEIGHT BEHIND YOKOTA IT COULD HAVE TURNED THE TABLES ON THE INCUMBENT.

5. THE SHIMANO STRATEGISTS ATTEMPTED TO BRIDGE THE JSP/JCP-DSP/KMT SPLIT THROUGH A SUPRA-PARTY "PEOPLES" ORGANIZATION." THE CONSENSUS IS, HOWEVER, THAT THIS TACTIC WAS ONLY MODERATELY SUCCESSFUL. ULTIMATELY SHIMANO'S VICTORY RESTED ON HIS PERSONAL POPULARITY BUILT UP OVER 20 YEARS AS MAYOR OF ONE OF JAPAN'S MOST PLEASANT CITIES IN WHICH TO LIVE. SHIMANO IS FAR FROM BEING A RADICAL IDEOLOGUE. OTHER THAN THE LENGTH OF SHIMANO'S INCUMBENCY, FEW IF ANY ISSUES SURFACED DURING THE CAMPAIGN. IN SENSE, SHIMANO'S VICTORY MAY BE SEEN AS A DEMONSTRATION OF A CONSERVATIVE MOOD AGAINST CHANGE AMONG SENDAI'S VOTERS.
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6. GIVEN THE ABOVE, WE SEE LITTLE REASON FOR THE JSP OR OTHER OPPOSITION PARTIES TO BE UNDULY HEARTENED BY THE SENDAI ELECTION RESULTS. RATHER IT SEEMS TO US TO BE MORE A CASE OF WHICH SIDE OUTFUMBLE THE OTHER. DESPITE ACROSS-THE-BOARD PROGRESSIVE SUPPORT FOR SHIMANO THE BASIC SPLITS IN THE OPPOSITION CAMP SEVERELY HAMPERED HIS CAMPAIGN AND HARDLY PROVIDED A MODEL FOR THE IMPORTANT CONTESTS IN YOKOHAMA AND KYOTO.
WESTMORE

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